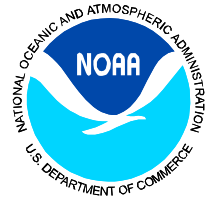


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News Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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New Species of Coral Found off Southern California

Scientists from NOAA and the University of California at Santa Barbara make discovery from deep-sea submersible

LOS ANGELES — A new species of black coral has been discovered off Southern California, as reported today in the online scientific journal Zootaxa (<http://www.mapress.com/zootaxa/content.html>). The Christmas Tree Coral (*Antipathes dendrochristos*) was observed from the manned submersible *Delta* by researchers from University of California Santa Barbara and NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Santa Cruz Laboratory during surveys of rockfishes on deep rocky banks about 40 miles offshore of Los Angeles.

"What is really remarkable," said biologist Mary Yoklavich from NMFS' Santa Cruz Laboratory, "is that these spectacular large colonies have managed to go unnoticed while living in the backyard of the largest urban area on the West Coast."

Coral specimens were collected in late 2002 during the survey dives and sent to black-coral expert Dennis Opresko, of the Oak Ridge National Laboratory, who determined the coral is, in fact, a new species.

"Many of the deepwater reefs in Southern California harbor remarkably healthy communities of corals, sponges, and other large invertebrates," said University of California, Santa Barbara researcher Milton Love. "What we need to know is the role that these large invertebrates play as deep-water habitats."

Found in water depths from approximately 300 to 725 feet, this species forms bushy colonies that grow to a height greater than six feet tall and resemble pink, white, and red-flocked Christmas trees. Since its discovery, researchers have found the coral living around several islands in the Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary and on several offshore banks.

Photographs of the new species of coral may be viewed at:

http://santacruz.nmfs.noaa.gov/ecology_branch/habitat_ecology/black_coral